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Schoolscapes
The Newsletter

Progress Report on the Implementation of the Reform

Pascale Sauvé

At the opening of this school year's second training session for resource persons, Margaret Rioux-Dolan, director of the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes, gave a progress report on work toward the implementation of the reform in elementary and secondary school.

In August, the 2001 version of the Québec Education Program for elementary school was distributed to schools and school boards, after having been reviewed, consolidated and made more concise. In addition, its presentation is now more uniform, simpler and clearer. "It's a tool that will unquestionably provide an excellent foundation for the work of drafting the Québec Education Program for secondary school," stated Rioux-Dolan.

A meeting on descriptive scales took place early last week. It was an opportunity to validate some of the scales. They will be finalized and made public at the end of January. "We have to realize that distributing them will not be enough; we also need to make sure people are able to work with them and use them properly," added Rioux-Dolan.

Last year the Ministère de l'Éducation announced that it would produce a support document for the Québec Education Program. "We have now decided to put this off," said Rioux-Dolan. "The Ministère would rather wait until teachers have become familiar with the Québec Education Program before giving them another document. Once they have become thoroughly familiar with the program, we will be able to meet any needs that arise. The work has been postponed, but we haven't given up the idea."

Secondary school

Work toward implementation of the reform in secondary school has also begun. "This work builds on what has been done at the elementary level," said Rioux-Dolan. "This is common-core basic education, so we have to be able to develop both cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies from one level of education to the next."

The drafting of the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle One has now started. It will be based on the same main concepts and will reflect the same major trends in education as the program for elementary school: placing students at the centre of the learning process and viewing teachers as professionals working in close cooperation with colleagues in their school, their cycle and their subject area. "We want a program that's in continuity with elementary school but that's still adaptable and capable of taking into consideration the realities of secondary school," observed Rioux-Dolan.

Another important aspect of the program is its decompartmentalization of subjects, which is intended to encourage teachers to work together. "The emphasis will be on the connections that can be made among subjects and also with the cross-curricular competencies and the broad areas of learning, so as to provide students with an integrated education," said Rioux-Dolan. As in the Québec Education Program for elementary school, essential competencies and knowledges will be closely linked to form a whole. However, in secondary school, the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies, the broad areas of learning, the subject areas and the end-of-cycle outcomes will be essentially the same as those in elementary school. "The elements are the same, but we're going to develop them and make them more complex," said Rioux-Dolan. The goal of the Ministère de l'Éducation is to make the Québec Education Program for Secondary Cycle One available at the end of August 2002, so that the schools and school boards can begin integration in the fall of 2002, and then begin implementation in September 2003.

Options for cycle-based organization

At the last province-wide meeting, in November, the Ministère de l'Éducation submitted a new plan of cycle-based organization in secondary school. While at this time the option of a three-year first cycle and a two-year second cycle (3-2) is the main one being considered, a second possibility is also being circulated: that of a two-year first cycle, a two-year second cycle and a final year of preparation (2-2-1).

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Progress report on the implementation of the reform

"What made us look at different models of cycle-based organization," explained Rioux-Dolan, "was the question of following the progress of students' learnings. We all know there's a big change in students between Secondary I and Secondary III." Working in two-year cycles would make things easier for students and teachers, especially since it would encourage teamwork in the cycle teams. With the 2-2-1 model, common-core basic education would continue until Secondary IV, but various kinds of exploration would be possible; the 4 elective credits in Secondary III and the 10 credits in Secondary V could be used and managed differently in different schools, so that each school could adapt to best meet the needs of its students.

In the coming weeks, these options will be submitted to schools and school boards for full analysis. The model selected should be known by late January or early February.

Testing

The Ministère de l'Éducation is currently working to determine how the curriculum will be tested in secondary school. It plans to call on the schools and school boards to help find pilot schools that are able to move more quickly and thus contribute to certain aspects of implemention of the reform: testing the program and its components, evaluation, or planning and developing working methods in the schools.

The idea is to find one pilot school in each school board that would take on this responsibility. At the same time, the pilot schools would work in collaboration with the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes as well as other departments in the Ministère. "There would be two broad focuses: first, student guidance and learning, and second, data collection," explained Rioux-Dolan. For the moment, the Ministère is still thinking about this. The form that testing will take will be determined shortly.

Margaret Rioux-Dolan took the opportunity to acknowledge the importance of the resource persons' work for the Ministère de l'Éducation and for their schools and school boards. "We are counting on you to support the people who are building our schools. Your role is very valuable."

The Challenges

Wendy Mill

For the first part of the round table, three speakers were asked to share their experiences in the implementation of the reform.

Madeleine Lanthier

Madeleine Lanthier is an education consultant in the commission scolaire Au coeur des vallées. This is her account. "When the reform was announced, our DES—a veritable muse of the reform—decided that henceforth we would make it our shared mission; whenever we met, this would be our focus. As education consultants, we are organized in terms of the reform: we are all in the same institution, on the same floor, in adjoining offices. We have also organized our timetables to be able to meet regularly."

Supporting the educational leaders

"Our principal clientele is school administrators. We offered our services as support for their educational leadership. We presented them with a concrete action plan and asked them to accept or reject it. As soon as it was accepted, we started our guidance activities.

First, we asked the administrators to dream of the school they'd like to see in 2006 if their school keeps pace with the reform. They were already capable of seeing the need for the reform and its promise. We also had them look at the past, at the origins of the reform and the evolution of education since 1964. Finally, they considered the present: what to reflect on and what actions to take to make the reform as effective as possible in their schools.

Our workshops were very practical. Authentic. We never simply transmitted information. The administrators always had meaningful tasks to carry out. They learned about cooperative teaching. School principals have to change paradigms, just like teachers.

Once we had set up a structure to provide the school administrators with guidance concerning their role as educational leaders, we offered to help them in the schools. There was only one condition: they had to participate, with us and with their school team."

Workshops for parents, workshops for secretaries

"Between 1998 and 2001, we must have organized about a dozen activities for school administrators. But the reform concerns all school staff, and parents as well; we also organized workshops to familiarize parents with the reform and its jargon. Here we adopted the same approach, asking the parents what a parents' night was usually like. They described an evening heavily based on the transmission of information. We made them discover the reform for themselves.

The secretaries often have to answer teachers' and parents' questions, so we had a workshop for them. Now they are able to talk about the reform as it concerns their experience as secretaries. I can tell you that that is an advantage in our own educational services sector: our secretary knows what we're talking about, when we say "learning situation" or "work in cycles," because we share what we experience with her.

In preparing our workshops, we ask ourselves who we are dealing with. When teachers join us for a session, we look at their Québec Education Program, which tells us where they are in the reform. If it's dirty and full of bookmarks, it's been used. That's a good sign.

There are many challenges ahead. Now that more and more people believe in this reform, we want to make sure everyone understands that when there are new elements—such as the guidance-oriented school—they aren't something different, they're all part of the reform. We have to continue to provide support for the schools without taking the place of the real educational leaders."

Jean Bruneau

Jean Bruneau is principal of the Polyvalente de Lévis, (commission scolaire des Navigateurs). This school offers an unusually large range of services, and, for that reason, the teachers are organized in six different units, including regular elementary and secondary units, sports-and-study units at both levels, and several programs, both temporary and continuous, for at-risk students. The sports-and-study clientele is growing. The diversity of the clientele, and especially the presence of the sports-and-study group, creates a certain tension within the school. Both the sports-and-study programs and those for at-risk students have to struggle against their competitors—the private schools and adult education respectively—to ensure their survival each year. Perhaps for this reason, these units display a high degree of cohesion and dynamism.

Implementation

At the outset, three classes were involved in the implementation process; now there are five. Two of the teachers who have participated from the beginning had been working in the spirit of the reform all along and were an asset to the others.

The school administration had to plan professional development for the other teachers. The objectives were:

- To make teachers aware of the need for ongoing professional development
- To enable each teacher to assimilate every element of the reform
- To enable all teachers to identify the aspects of their practice that are consistent with the reform and those that need adjusting
- To enable all teachers to adjust their teaching practices in keeping with the school's educational project
- To enable the teachers to stay up-to-date in their practices

The school's educational project is the reference point for all projects and activities—for the success plan, the reform, student activities, and so on. "We always ask, How does it relate to the educational project?" said Bruneau.

The school had to establish a team of "navigators" who could guide others in the implementation of the reform. This project started in 2000. To begin with, the teachers

of the Guidance Process

evaluated the plan for continuing professional development proposed by the administration, did a survey of the school staff's knowledge of the reform, and formed the navigation team to guide the professional development process. This team was recruited by means of a contest, and the administration was pleased to observe that there were more candidates than positions. The resulting team comprised two teachers per unit, one education consultant and the five-person administration.

Each teacher in the navigation team received a portfolio containing a personal professional development plan, the assessment of his or her knowledge of the reform (based on the survey), an inventory of his or her needs with respect to the reform, the school's educational project, the Québec Education Program and a list of professional competencies.

In this way, the school established a chain of learning, by means of which this team could familiarize other school staff with the reform. Their long-term aim, of course, is to continue the process, reaching all teachers, as well as the students, their parents and the community.

Further steps

In January 2001, the school undertook to show how much fun the reform can be. It reserved the Musée de la civilisation in Québec on a Monday, when the museum is closed. The whole school staff, all mixed together (otherwise they tend to stick together by area), participated in a guided visit of the museum's exhibits, with guides pointing out the pedagogical possibilities of the various exhibits. This had a stimulating effect, and many participants began formulating new projects. This cultural outing was followed by a training session at school for the teachers and by a third session, on new pedagogical approaches, with Nicole Tardif, an instructor at l'Université de Sherbrooke.

Circumstances beyond their control

The school had other plans. In November, the staff were to meet with Nicole Tardif again, and in January 2002 another visit to the museum was in the works. Those plans are now on hold. The school administrators will continue their professional development on an individual basis in January, Bruneau said. In addition, during the 2002-2003 school year, the school intends to create a sense of solidarity and collegiality in this building "the size of a shopping centre" by building common teachers' rooms and uniting the different units' secretarial offices. And, whenever the teachers are ready, the implementation process can go full-tilt again.

Louise Lafortune

Louise Lafortune, a researcher at CIRAD (Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche sur les apprentissages et le développement en éducation), explained that as a researcher, she found it hard to suppress her professional self and give a purely personal account of her experience; inevitably, her account would include both her ideas and her experience.

For the past 15 years, she has been carrying out projects in the schools. These projects have had three common threads:

- A social-constructivist perspective: it is important to practice what you preach; this is the only way to be consistent and to provide credible guidance.
- Always include some reflection—on the learning process (what we learned, how, what enabled us to learn and how we will apply it), and on our teaching practices, with a view to changing them as needed.
- A metacognitive perspective: seek to study yourself as you act; study others, individually and collectively; share and analyze your observations with others. This is the only way to adjust your practices in action and to verify whether the adjustment worked in a given guidance situation.

Since it is important that all partners be involved and that they have confidence in each other, she developed and carried out her projects in partnership. This entails certain difficulties, however, because in practice, you can't include 30 or 50 people in the development of a project. So you develop it with 8 or 10 people, and that means that although it was a team product, it will still need adjustment. She has also learned that sometimes you have to give up certain activities you have planned. You have to think of the needs of the people receiving the guidance.

Over the years she has realized that it is necessary to rethink the approach to university training. We need to create new models that favour cooperation and partnership and guidance. She's also learned that when one looks at an activity to be carried out in class, one tends to focus on the content at first. You have to work to see the structure of the activity, to grasp its social-constructivist, reflexive and metacognitive aspects. Afterwards, it will be easier to apply. This is hard work with a scenario developed by someone else. Providers of guidance must develop this skill.

Other principles she has developed are the following:

- You have to take into account what has already been achieved. She says she tended not to do this earlier in her career, but in a social-constructivist perspective, it is a given.
- Lead people to reflect on what they know or have accomplished and, from there, to see how to apply this to new circumstances.

By providing guidance, she has learned more about the metacognitive process. Depending on the level of involvement, one may emphasize a metacognitive, cognitive or reflective process. But they are all important. And they all provoke a salutary cognitive imbalance.

In closing, she asked us what we think are the positive (and negative) aspects of experiencing a moment of safety, and of experiencing a moment of cognitive imbalance. She left us with something to reflect on: how can we create a reassuring cognitive imbalance?

For an integrated vision of the Québec Education Program

Different Visions

Claudine St-Germain

In the training session's second workshop, the participants reflected on ways to integrate the different elements of the Québec Education Program.

The workshop participants were supposed to discuss ways to meaningfully integrate one or more focuses of development of the broad areas of learning and subject-specific competencies into the students' learnings, taking into account all school services. Two approaches were proposed: via the subject-specific competencies or via the cross-curricular competencies.

Upon reflection, most teams concluded that the starting point mattered little: it was possible to accomplish the task whether they approached it via the broad areas of learning or the subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies. The important thing is to bear in mind all three aspects in the planning of educational activities. One participant remarked, however, that a multidisciplinary approach and authentic tasks may be easier to achieve if one approaches the integration from the focuses of development of the broad areas of learning.

The participants were then asked to identify the conditions conducive to this integration in planning, carrying out and evaluating educational activities. Among the answers were: team work; a school that accepts project-based learning; favourable material conditions; a thorough understanding of the Québec Education Program by all members of the school team; a guidance process that respects differences of opinion; identification of clear goals; professional intervention regarding all three aspects; clear identification of the aims from start to finish and ensuring that students are fully aware of the learnings they acquire.

General reflections concerning the training sessions

In addition, questions were raised with the resource persons regarding the training sessions. Some participants wondered why it was that the workshops raised many issues but provided few answers to the questions that really bothered them. Others found it rather difficult to work with people at different points in their assimilation of the reform.

In response, a workshop leader pointed out that first of all, the participants come from such diverse social and educational contexts that it is impossible to offer ready-to-use models, and that furthermore, such "recipes" would be incompatible with the principles of the reform. The main objective of the workshops is to encourage reflection and real discussion in order to enable the participants to find their own solutions. As for the presence of people with different perspectives or backgrounds, the workshop leader point out that this raises the issue of differentiated teaching, which is an essential element of the pedagogical process.

Some participants said they agreed with the principles governing the organization of the training sessions. As one participant said, "We were accustomed to working with a frame of reference; now we have to adopt new ways of doing things." Another claimed that: "When I began attending the training sessions, I was looking for easy answers. Now, if I think I'm being fed easy answers, I get mad. That's how I can tell how much progress I've made."

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